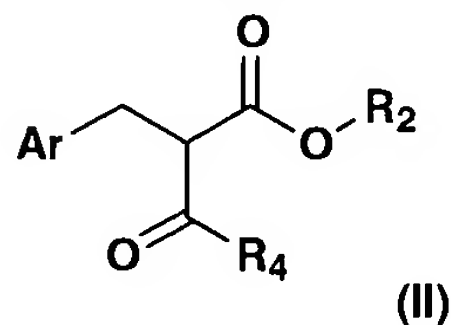# AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS

Claims 1 to 11. (Cancelled).

Claim 12. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing a compound of formula II:


(II)

wherein R_2 and R_4 are independently C_1 to C_6 alkyl, the method comprising:

reacting at least five molar equivalents of R_4-C(O)-CH$_2$-C(O)O-R$_2$ with one molar equivalent of ArCH$_2$Cl wherein Ar is C_6 or C_{10} aromatic group that can be substituted with C_1 to C_6 alkyl or halo, wherein the reaction is conducted in a solution consisting essentially of the reactants and no more than 1.2 molar equivalents of a base source of sodium, potassium, or lithium C_2 to C_6 alkoxide, which can be provided in the corresponding alcohol.

Claim 13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the alkoxide concentration in the base source is at least 3 M.

Claim 14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein in the compound of formula II Ar is phenyl and R^2 and R^4 are each methyl.

Claim 15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein R_4–C(O)–CH$_2$–C(O)O–R_2– is ethyl acetoacetate, ArCH$_2$Cl is benzylchloride and the compound of formula II is
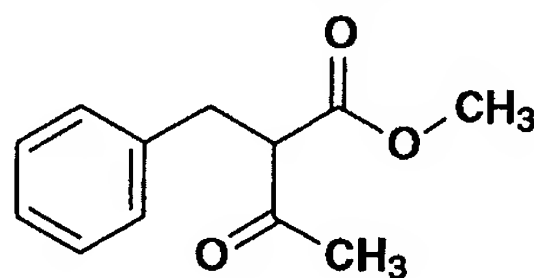
Claim 16. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein R_4–C(O)–CH$_2$–C(O)O–R_2 is ethyl acetoacetate.

Claim 17. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein ArCH$_2$Cl is benzyl chloride.

Claim18. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein the base source is sodium chloride in ethanol.

Claim 19. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein R_4-C(0)-CH_2-(O)O-R_2 is ethyl acetoacetate, $ArCH_2Cl$ is benzyl chloride and the base source is sodium ethoxide in ethanol.

Claim 20. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein the compound formed is ethyl-2-benzyl acetoacetate.

Claim 21. (New) The method as defined in Claim 12 wherein $ArCH_2Cl$ is naphthylmethyl chloride.